

FISCAL YEAR 2020

Brookline Senior Center Programming

Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2020 (FY2020) began similarly to other fiscal years with the Brookline Senior Center offering a wide variety of educational, informational, and social programs for Brookline seniors.

In addition to our large number of ongoing weekly programs, some of “special” programming highlights between July 2019 and February 2020 included:

Pastel Workshop with renowned pastel artist Greg Maichack

Six-week chronic pain workshop

A performance by the Mazl Tov Chorus

Theater Club trips to the Reagle Music Theatre in Waltham

ArtMatters presentations

Brookline Historical Society presentation

Informational health programs on nutrition, frontotemporal dementia, and dental care.

LGBTQ+ Rainbow Cinema movie series

Party of a Century honoring local centenarians

Death Café

Pickleball (in collaboration with Brookline Recreation)

Chinese New Year Celebration featuring a Lion Dance

African American Patriots presentation by the Freedom Trail Foundation

"Rights and Wrongs: Black Women and the History of Voting" presentation by Dr. Kellie Carter-Jackson, Knafel Assistant Professor of the Humanities in the Department of Africana Studies at Wellesley College (sponsored by the Brookline Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Relations)

Valentine's Day Dance at Fenway Park sponsored by the Boston Red Sox

By March 2020, we began to feel the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to proactively slow and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community, the Senior Center suspended all “in person” programming as of March 12, 2020 and the building was closed to the public indefinitely the following week.

At that time, our first priority was reaching out to all of the Senior Center participants for whom we had contact information to see if they had any essential needs that were not being met such as, grocery shopping, medication pick-ups, etc.

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Concurrently, we began our attempts to develop some online programming options. Prior to the closure, the Senior Center had never conducted any kind of virtual “online” programming and we had only anecdotal information about how many of our participants had access to technology and/or the skills necessary to utilize available technologies. Most of our staff had little experience with online platforms such as, Webex or Zoom at the outset and so there was a steep learning curve for our staff, volunteers, and participants.

In addition, our primary source of communication regarding upcoming program opportunities had been via our print newsletter and our weekly TAB listings. Although our newsletter was also available online, it was unclear as to how many of our participants were accessing information that way. Given our prior success using these two methods of communication, we had not developed any comprehensive email database and we had limited means of conveying time sensitive information to a large number of our participants otherwise. We have since been able to develop an email list of over 600 names with whom we can communicate directly in a timely way as needed.

As was the case prior to the pandemic, we primarily rely on our wonderful volunteers to lead our regular, ongoing programs. This need became even greater following our closure as our social work staff was focusing on ensuring that the immediate physical and emotional needs of our seniors were being met.

Thankfully, a few of our dedicated program leaders were willing to give the online programming a try and we were able to successfully launch a small group of online program offerings in March and April. Some of those initial offerings included our Brookline Bees sewing/quilting group, our Living Our Values discussion group, dance/fitness classes and a drawing class. In addition, one of our social work staff members was able to move our mindfulness/meditation group offering online. Our weekly, ongoing virtual program listings have continued to expand to include a virtual coffee hour, additional fitness classes, a current events discussion group and many other offerings.

Additionally, we continued to reach out to some of our community partners to offer “special” programming. For example, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) partnered with us to pilot a series of health-based webinars. Based on their initial success, BCBSMA has scheduled another series of webinars for the fall of 2020. We also worked with our local Toastmasters chapter to develop a successful two part “Introduction to Genealogy” workshop series. We continue to be grateful to all of our volunteers and community partners who have worked so hard to provide online content for Brookline seniors.

Lastly, we reached out to a number of our long-time paid performers and presenters to assess their interest and ability to create some kind of online content. Recognizing the impact that the closure of senior centers had on these performers and presenters, who are often seniors

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themselves, we wanted to support them in whatever way possible. We discovered that many of these presenters and performers were not well acquainted with the technology required to produce any kind of “live” online presentations or performances initially. It was also unclear as to how some of their content would “translate” to an online platform so this aspect of programming was a little slower to develop.

We also discovered that it was difficult to gather a large audience for a “live” online program during which participants can actively engage with the presenter or other group members. Given our limited budget, we had to be conscious of and creative about how to best develop programming content with these presenters/performers.

Rather than providing only “live” Zoom programming for our participants, we decided to explore the possibility of our presenters/performers providing prerecorded content that our participants could access online at any time that was convenient for them. We have since provided prerecorded online content in the form of concerts, cooking and nutrition demonstrations, and a mediation webinar to name a few. We are continuing our work to expand these offerings going forward.

The prerecorded content also allows us to reach participants who do not have access to the technology itself or the necessary skills required. Brookline Interactive Group (BIG), our local cable access channel has offered to collaborate with us going forward around showing some of our prerecorded content on their channels in hopes of reaching those seniors.

We hope to continue our long-time collaborations with other community organizations such as, Brookline Adult & Community Education, Center Communities of Brookline, and Goddard House Assisted Living to provide expanded online program opportunities for Brookline seniors in the future.

As Governor Baker’s phased reopening was implemented, the Senior Center began working closely with the Brookline Health Department to develop health and safety protocols for essential “on site” programming to be conducted at the Senior Center. Our primary goals were the development of a “grab and go” lunch program in collaboration with Springwell, the resumption of our monthly food commodity program in collaboration with the Greater Boston Food Bank, the completion of our income tax assistance appointments in collaboration with AARP, and the resumption of our podiatry services.

After much discussion and planning around safety protocols and procedures, we were able to complete our AARP income tax assistance appointments for the 2019 tax year. We were also able to successfully launch a “grab and go” lunch pick up program outside of the Senior Center on Mondays and Fridays. For those who were unable to physically travel to the Center for whatever reason, we utilized our Senior Center bus and van to make home deliveries. The

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response was so high (an average of 50 participants each day), that we decided to add a third day beginning in August 2020. We plan to continue to offer this service as long as weather permits and is allowable under the Governor's reopening plan.

Lastly, we were able to successfully resume our monthly food commodity program distribution in front of the Senior Center in June and July.

At the close of the fiscal year, we were still working with the Health Department to develop an appropriate protocol in order to resume podiatry services. We will also continue to evaluate the need for additional "in person" services at the Center going forward.

FY2020 has been challenging for us in so many ways, but we will continue our efforts to stay connected with Brookline seniors via direct outreach, interesting and enriching online program opportunities, and essential in person services.